



# California Department of Veterans Affairs

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## NEWS FOR VETERANS

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### FROM THE DESK OF VETERANS AFFAIRS SECRETARY TOM JOHNSON

#### STAND DOWNS – A HAND UP, NOT A HANDOUT

In July I met "Joe," a clean-cut and tanned veteran whose life had been altered for the good at the Ventura County Stand Down last year. Joe had come off the streets to seek help (with a half-gallon of wine in his backpack). After 5 years in the Marines, several years in the Army Reserves and several years in the National Guard he had not found peace. The Ventura County Stand Down did not allow him to take in his wine but they did take him in and this year he was back as a volunteer to help. For the past year he has been clean and sober, living and working at a shelter in Santa Barbara and ready to get back into a life of service to others and his country.

Stand Downs can't point to "success" in the case of every veteran, but they do help many veterans who are homeless or living in shelters to find the resources they need to turn a corner. "Top" and his crew run the Stand Down I visited in Ventura like a tight ship. It is a place where veterans can receive help, feel safe and perhaps even renew their feelings of pride and camaraderie they once felt during their service years. It is also run with compassion and caring by a host of volunteers coordinated by Claire Hope. They provide meals, clean clothing, medical treatment, counseling, legal assistance and a tie-in to the V.A. services through on-site representatives.

It is estimated by the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs that up to 55,000 homeless veterans live on the streets or in shelters in California. The Stand Down is an attempt to break the cycle of hopelessness that plagues many veterans who return from their military service and face various and sundry problems in their transition to civilian life. The USDVA has full time staff and a budget specifically directed towards helping the homeless veterans. The Veterans Services Division of our Department has also played a key role in helping Stand Downs with grants, support and encouragement. Hopefully, we can do more in the future by dedicating additional resources to work with the Stand Downs and to assist other communities who want to develop this program. It is an excellent service that truly deserves our support in reaching out to some of society's most needy veterans. On behalf of Joe, Top, and all veterans (and our Department): Thanks to everyone who makes the Stand Downs so successful!

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#### LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

The following resolution has been adopted by the Legislature and chaptered:

SJR 16, Morrow. **MILITARY AIRFARES.**

This measure would urge airline companies in the United States to permanently establish reduced price

airfares for active duty military personnel. SJR 16 can be found at the following website:  
[http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/bill/sen/sb\\_0001-0050/sjr\\_16\\_bill\\_20040616\\_chaptered.html](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/bill/sen/sb_0001-0050/sjr_16_bill_20040616_chaptered.html)

## ACR 171, Maze. VIETNAM WAR VETERANS

This measure requested the Governor to proclaim March 8, 2005, a day in honor of Vietnam War veterans and to proclaim that the State of California fly its flags at half-mast on that day in honor of these veterans. ACR 171 can be found at the following website:

[http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/bill/asm/ab\\_0151-0200/acr\\_171\\_bill\\_20040716\\_chaptered.html](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/bill/asm/ab_0151-0200/acr_171_bill_20040716_chaptered.html)

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## NEWS FROM BLUE STAR MOTHERS OF AMERICA:

### FAIR MILITARY AIRFARE

Did you know that the men and women actively serving our Country in the military are paying for their own flights home during leave, and - in many instances - are paying higher fares than you?

As a result of this, many of them are unable to come home, as they cannot afford the airfare.

Why don't they take advantage of the low purchase-in-advance tickets that the airlines offer?

Many of them are unable to book their tickets in advance as their leaves are not always granted 21, 14 or even 7 days in advance.

Blue Star Mothers of America has asked the airlines to do two things:

1. Reinstate the airfare that was offered to active duty military personnel during the Vietnam War. It was called "Military Standby." It was less expensive than "Military Reserve," which was the other airfare offered during that time. Anyone showing an active military ID paid a greatly reduced price for his or her ticket. Blue Star Mothers want the airlines to fill those otherwise empty seats with the men and women who are putting their lives on the line to serve our Country.
2. Provide active duty military personnel a guaranteed seat at the 21-day advance fare for all tickets booked anytime prior to the flight. If the flight needs to be changed because of a change in orders (which can be substantiated), the airlines should waive any fees or penalties and the total amount should be 100% refundable. Blue Star Mothers have heard back from only four airlines, and they are unable to comply with their requests.

The response from the airlines has not been as positive as was hoped for. What can you do to help?

For starters, visit the Blue Star Mothers of America website at

<http://www.bluestarmothers.org/> to sign their petition. You will find a sample letter and email message, plus the addresses of airline executives and the email addresses of elected officials whom you can request to support lower airfares for soldiers in active duty.

You can also sign the Blue Star Mothers of America petition for Fair Military Airfare at:

<http://www.petitiononline.com/BSMMIL/petition.html>.

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